

left the workforce, while about 71,000 men left the workforce. Overall, approximately 2.4 million women have left the workforce since last February. This has been a common and unfortunate trend we are seeing as a result of the pandemic, and I know for certain it is definitely tied to the fact that schools have not reopened.

West Virginia's State superintendent said recently:

There is absolutely no substitution for a teacher in the lives of a child.

He continued by saying:

There is no substitution for what that means to the community and the families—not just for the academics but for the social, emotional, [and] physical well-being.

He is absolutely right, and this is just another reason why it is so important for our children to return to school safely.

At the same time, I know there is no one-size-fits-all solution. State leaders, local governments, school administrators, and parents must take this data and these recommendations and apply them to the realities they see in their own communities.

Congress has provided \$68 billion in resources for K-12 schools that they could use last year, which schools could use to implement these strategies. For these, this may mean continuing some form of remote learning. For others, including my State of West Virginia, it means bringing every K-8 student to a 5-day school week.

Before I conclude, I want to take a moment to thank the teachers, the parents, and the students who have adjusted and readjusted over the past years.

Despite the many challenges—whether they are technical, logistical, or emotional challenges—you have tried to make it work the best you can, and for that we are all very grateful. But now we have to do the three r's. We must look at the data, listen to the stories, and look at the realities in our classrooms and in our communities.

Get our children back to school. Respect the science. Reopen the schools safely, and return students, teachers, and learning to the classroom, where it should be.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DURBIN). The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I first want to thank my colleague from West Virginia and my colleague from Iowa for their focus on getting our kids back in school.

I agree with the three r's: respect the science, reopen our schools safely, and return our teachers and our children to our classrooms.

It has been almost a year since schools first shuttered due to COVID-19. In many States across the Nation, unfortunately, schools remain closed. The consequences are devastating. Being forced to stay at home is taking a significant social and emotional toll, and it also directly impacts our children's future.

Continuing to subject kids to this unnecessary virtual-learning system is not backed by science or facts. I applaud my State of Florida for getting schools reopened quickly and safely.

The science is overwhelming and clear about reopening our Nation's schools. It is safe, and it is necessary for the well-being and the future of students. The CDC confirmed last month that in-person instruction does not pose an increased risk of community transmission. Schools can and should be open, and they can do so safely.

We need to be honest about why we are even having this conversation today. The only reason schools across the Nation remain closed is because my Democratic colleagues and the Biden administration are standing with teachers unions instead of standing up for our children.

For months, we have heard Democrats preach about following the science, but now Democrats don't want to acknowledge the scientific evidence that school reopenings are safe. They are blindly following the teachers unions because they are afraid of losing campaign contributions, and they are pushing a lie that schools can't reopen without more taxpayer money.

Here is the truth: The funding they claim is absolutely necessary for schools to reopen would not even be allocated for 2 or 3 years. According to the Congressional Budget Office, Biden's COVID spending bill would distribute only \$6.4 billion to K-12 schools this year. The remaining \$122 billion would be spent between the years 2022 and 2028.

Here is another fact: Congress has already provided \$68 billion for K-12 schools, but so far States have spent just \$4 billion of that money. Schools don't need more money to open safely. Yet the Biden administration keeps clinging to this lie and doing everything possible to keep schools closed.

Last week, Speaker PELOSI said:

We want as many kids to be back in school as possible. For that to happen, it takes some money.

Also last week, Vice President HARRIS would not directly answer whether it is safe for teachers to go back to school if they are not vaccinated, despite clear CDC guidelines that it is not a prerequisite if other safety measures are in place.

And earlier this month, all 50 Senate Democrats voted against students safely returning to classrooms even after teachers have been vaccinated. We all agree that teachers should be able to receive vaccinations. I will work with any of my colleagues on a way to get vaccines to teachers more quickly.

We all agree that schools should have additional resources to ensure our students and teachers have safe, clean, and healthy classrooms, and we have allocated \$68 billion to do just that right now. But keeping schools closed doesn't make sense. It is hurting our children and America's poorest families the most.

I grew up in a poor family that struggled to make ends meet, and education was life-changing for me, just as it is for families across our great country. Every student in this Nation deserves the option of in-person learning.

It is time for the Biden administration to acknowledge that the best place for children to learn is in the classroom, and it is time for my Democratic colleagues and the President to stop putting union bosses ahead of America's students and families.

Let's get our schools open now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 8.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Gina Marie Raimondo, of Rhode Island, to be Secretary of Commerce.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Executive Calendar No. 8, Gina Marie Raimondo, of Rhode Island, to be Secretary of Commerce.

Charles E. Schumer, Sherrod Brown, Sheldon Whitehouse, Benjamin L. Cardin, Robert Menendez, Patrick J. Leahy, Alex Padilla, Jacky Rosen, Richard J. Durbin, Tammy Baldwin, Jack Reed, Chris Van Hollen, Richard Blumenthal, Tim Kaine, Martin Heinrich, Christopher Murphy, Maria Cantwell.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call for the cloture motion be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.